

Civilization and Christianization of the Ojibways in Minnesota /

CIVILIZATION AND CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE OJIBWAYS IN MINNESOTA.* By The Right Reverend Henry B. Whipple, D. D., LL. D., Bishop of Minnesota .

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Gentlemen of the Historical Society: It is a great pleasure to tell you the story of our missions to the Ojibways, whom I have learned to love as the brown children of our Heavenly Father. The Noah American Indian is the noblest type of a wild man in the world. He recognizes a Great Spirit; has an unwavering faith in a future life, a passionate love for his children, and will lay down his life unflinchingly for his people. I have never known an Indian to tell me a lie,—a characteristic of the Indian character to which the officers of the United States Army will bear testimony.

The Ojibways belong to the Algonquin division of tire aboriginal American people, which included all the Indians from the Atlantic to the forests of Minnesota, north of the Cherokees, except the Six Nations of New York. Their language is both beautiful and interesting, and exhibits the nicest shades of meaning. The verbs have more inflections than in the Greek language. Perhaps the Epistles of St. Paul are the crux to test a language, but in that respect the richness of the Ojibway tongue cannot be exceeded. Polygamy has existed with them to a much, less degree than among other Indians.

At the time of my consecration, Bishop Kemper, honored by all men, said to me, "Dear brother, do not forget the poor Indians who are committed to your care and whom you may gather into the fold of Christ." Three weeks after coming to Minnesota, in 1860, I visited the Indian country. The Indians had fallen to a depth of degradation unknown to their heathen fathers. Our Indian affairs were at their worst. 9 130 The Indians were regarded

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by politicians as a key to unlock the public treasury, and even Christian folk said, in the language of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Much as I had heard of their sorrow and wretchedness, I was appalled by the revelation of my first visit. As we entered the forest, we found a dead Indian by the wayside, who had been killed in a drunken fight. A few miles farther on we came to a wigwam where the mother was stripping the outer bark from a pine tree that she might give the pitch to her children to satisfy the gnawings of hunger. Almost at every step we were met by some sign of the existing degradation.

At Gull lake, James Lloyd Breck, of blessed memory, had gathered a little band of Christian Indians. He had left them to establish another mission at Leech lake. The Indians while maddened with drink had driven him and his family from the country. They afterward told me that white men had assured them that their grand medicine was as good as any religion, and that if they did not want the missionary they might drive him away. I held services in the log church, and I remember how deeply my heart was touched by the devotion of a few Christian Indians as I heard for the first time the services of the Church in their musical language.

That same night the deadly fire-water made a pandemonium, and I could only say, "How long, O Lord?" But I then settled the question that, whatever success or failure might attend my efforts, I would never turn my back upon the heathen at any door. Friends within and without my diocese advised me to have nothing to do with Indian missions, saying that a young bishop could, not afford to make a failure in his work. I carried it where have learned to carry all troubles, and I promised my Saviour that, God helping me, I would never cease my efforts for this wronged race. The Rev. E. S. Peake was a missionary residing at Crow Wing, and the Rev. John Johnson Enmegahbowh, ordained a deacon by Bishop Kemper, was living at Gull lake. I spent the following summer visiting all the scattered bands of the Ojibways, and holding services. After one of them, a chief asked me if the Jesus of whom I spoke was the same Jesus that my white brother talked to when he was angry or drunk. The head chief of Sandy lake said to me: "You have spoken 131 strong words against fire-water and impurity; but, my friend, you have made a mistake.

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These are words you should carry to your white brothers who bring us the fire-water and corrupt our daughters. They are the sinners, not we."

But there were gleams of light. An Indian woman, the queen of the Pokegamas, followed me thirty miles to attend a service. She said to me: "Your missionary baptized my daughter. The Great Spirit called her home. I have heard a whisper in my heart, 'You must be a Christian and follow your child to the Great Spirit's home.'" At another place I buried the child of a woman who brought me a lock of hair, saying: "Kechemuckadaiconai, the Great Spirit has called my child. I have heard that when white mothers lose their babies they sometimes have their hair made into a cross to remind them of the baby who has gone, and of Jesus who called it. Will you have my baby's hair made into a cross?" The following year, this woman walked forty miles to give me a large mokuk of dried berries. She said nothing, but pointed to the little cross which I had made for her. They were simple things, but they told me that the hearts of an Indian mother and a white mother are alike.

I will mention an incident of our Sioux mission. Some of my hearers will remember the noted Sioux orator, Red Owl. He never attended a church service. One day he came into the school-room. There hung on the wall the picture of the Ecce Homo,—that sweet, sad face of the Saviour. He asked, "Who is that? Why are His hands bound? Why are those thorns on His head, and blood on His brow?" Again and again he came. to the school-room and sat before the picture, asking questions about the "Son of the Great Spirit," until he had learned the story. One day as I was driving over the prairie, I saw a wood cross over a newly made grave, and when I asked what it meant, Wabasha told me that Red Owl was dead; that he had suddenly been taken ill, and that when he was dying he called his young men around him and said, "The story of the Great Spirit is true. I have it in my heart. When I am dead put a cross, like that on the mission house, over my grave, that the Indians may see what was in Red Owl's heart."

For three years we labored faithfully, but the clouds were often black and there was much to perplex in the example 132 of a Christian nation. On one occasion the Sioux had killed

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one of our Ojibways near Gull river. On my next visit to the Sioux country I said to their head chief, "Wabasha, your people have murdered one of my Ojibways, and yesterday you had a scalp dance in front of our mission. The wife and children of the murdered man are asking for him. The Great Spirit is angry." Wabasha drew his pipe from his mouth, and, slowly blowing a cloud of smoke into the air, said: "White men go to war with their own brothers, and kill more men than Wabasha can count all the days of his life. Great Spirit looks down and says, 'Good white man; he has my book; I love him, and will give him good place when he dies.' Indian has no Great Spirit book. He wild man. Kill one man; has scalp dance. Great Spirit very angry. Wabasha don't believe it!"

In 1862, I visited the Sioux Mission on the upper Minnesota river. There were forerunning signs of the coming of that awful massacre. These Indians had sold to the United States government eight hundred thousand acres of their reservation, for which they had never received a penny, except a few worthless goods sent to the Upper Sioux. They had been told by the traders that all had been paid out for claims, and that a large part of their annuities had also been thus used. It was true. Of the money which came too late, twenty-five thousand dollars had been taken from other trust funds to pay these annuities.

I visited the Ojibways, on my return, at Crow Wing, and while I was there a letter came to Hole-in-the-Day, in care of the Rev. Mr. Peake, marked "In haste." Hole-in-the-Day was at Leech lake. I sent for his head warrior, who opened the letter. It was from Little Crow, and said: "Your men killed one of our farmer Indians. I tried to keep my men back. They have gone for scalps. Look out!" On my way to Red lake, I found the Indians turbulent, and felt that an impending cloud hung over our border. When it broke the only light which fell upon the scenes of bloodshed was that which came from the loyalty of those Christian Indians who rescued so many women and children from death. Enmegahbowh, who had been made a prisoner, escaped and travelled thirty miles in the night to warn Fort Ripley of its danger. He sent Chief Bad Boy to the Mille Lacs Indians 133 to call them to the defense of the fort; and before Hole-in-the-Day could begin war, the northern border was protected. I

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can never forget the love and bravery of those Christian Indians who proved their fidelity at the risk of their lives.

Both of our missions, to the Sioux and to the Ojibways, were destroyed, and during those dark days it seemed as if the ground was drifting from under my feet. We began work again, and in 1867 we secured a valuable reservation for the Ojibways at White Earth. My heart was full of hope, but when I visited the Ojibways, they said that this was the first march towards the setting sun; that all Indians who had left their own homes had perished, and that their shadows rested upon their graves. Nabonaskong, the most fearless warrior I have ever known, said: "The Bishop has a straight tongue. He says we shall be saved if we go to White Earth. We know it is a beautiful country. My children are looking in a grave. You know me. I will kill any man who tries to hinder me from going to that new home." Other Indians followed his example, and a little company removed to White Earth, with Enmegahbowh as their clergyman.

Some months afterward, Nabonaskong went to Enmegahbowh and said: "That story about Jesus is true. I know it. The trail brought by the Christian white man is good. But I have been a warrior. My hands are covered with blood. Can I be a Christian?" Enmegahbowh made the crucial test by asking if he might cut his hair. The Indian wears his scalp-lock for his enemy; and when his hair is cut, it is a sign he will no longer go on the war path. I have had a man tremble under the shears as he would not if a pistol were put at his head. Nabonaskong's hair was cut, and he started for home. He met some wild Indians on the way, who shouted with laughter and said, "Yesterday you were our leader. To-day you are a squaw!" It stung the man to madness. He rushed to his wigwam, and, throwing himself on the ground, cried, for the first time in his life. His Christian wife knelt by his side and said, "Nabonaskong, no man can call you a coward. Can you not be as brave for Him who died for you as you were to kill the Sioux?" Springing to his feet, he cried, "I can and I will!" 134 He was true to his vow; his influence over other Indians was great, and in his

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last illness he sent for his people and urged them to throw aside their wild life and become Christians.

One of those whom he led to Christ was Shadayence, the head grand medicine man of the nation. In the early days I used to call this man my Alexander Coppersmith, for he was the most cunning opponent of Christianity. The only Christian Indian in a certain village died, and left messages for his friends to follow him to the Great Spirit's home. It made a deep impression upon his people, and a few days afterward the medicine men left the village, and were not heard from for weeks. When they returned their faces were blackened and they were in rags, the sign of mourning. The Indians gathered around them and asked what it meant. After much persuasion they told their story, saying that they had found the Indian who had just died, in great trouble. The Great Spirit had permitted them to see the other world, and they had found their friend wandering alone. He told them that when he died he went up to the white man's heaven, and the angel who guarded the gate asked him who he was. He said that he was a Christian Ojibway. The angel shut the gate, saying, "This is a white man's heaven. There are Happy Hunting Grounds for the Ojibways, in the west." He then went to the Happy Hunting Grounds; but when he asked for admission, the angel asked who he was, and upon hearing that he was a Christian Ojibway answered: "The Ojibways are medicine men. If you are a Christian you must go to the other heaven." He was shut out of both, and must wander alone forever.

In the early days of my Indian missions, I took a load of Indian children to Faribault. At Little Falls, a number of frontier men, who looked upon me as a tenderfoot, gathered about the wagon and said, "I wonder if the Bishop expects to make Christians out of them. It can't be done any more than you can tame a weasel." After the Sioux outbreak, the Ojibways were afraid to trust their children in Faribault, which they regarded as a part of the Sioux country, and they were taken away. One day I met a lumberman at Brainerd, who said to me, "Bishop, I don't take any stock in your Indian 135 missions." I replied, "I do not think you take stock in any missions." He smiled and responded, "That's so; but I know an Indian in my camp who is a Christian sure! He is the only man who don't swear or drink

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whisky. His only fault is that he won't work Sundays." I visited the camp, and found the son of Shadayence. I educated him, and ordained him; and when his father saw him for the first time in a surplice, preaching the gospel of Christ, he was deeply moved and became himself a Christian.

Another of these Indian boys was employed as a chainman by a United States surveyor. A few days after he began his work, he asked permission to return to his home, saying, "Your young men swear. There are no oaths in the Indian language. I am afraid that I may learn to use these words." The surveyor called his employees together and told them the story, which so touched them that it ended profanity in the camp. This boy, Fred Smith, I also educated and ordained, and he is now in charge of the beautiful church at White Earth, of which Enmegahbowh is the rector emeritus. Still another of those boys has been ordained, and has made full proof of his ministry.

There are to-day ten Ojibway churches in the state of Minnesota, and seven Ojibway clergymen, besides several catechists and lay readers. I once asked a border man about one of my Indian clergymen, and he replied, "Bishop, he doesn't let the grass grow under his feet, and he doesn't wake up anybody's sleeping dogs."

I have often been asked if all Indians who were baptized, remained true to their profession; and I have answered, "Did you ever know of a white man, with fifteen hundred years of civilization back of him, to fail as a model of Christian character?" But I do say that there are no memories in my heart clearer than those of many of the brown children whom we have been permitted to lead out of heathen darkness.

I have not spoken of the Christian labors of other religions bodies. I have made it a rule of my life never to interfere with other Christian work. One of the noblest specimens of the Indian, Mahdwagononint (a brief sketch of whose life I recently published), came to me in 1865, and asked me for a missionary. The Congregationalists had sent a missionary 136 to Red lake, but Mahdwagononint said to me, "I want your kind. You have been my friend

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and have helped save my people." After repeated appeals, I wrote to the secretary of the American Missionary Association, and asked permission to send an Indian clergyman to Red lake, saying that their mission had not been a success, and that, although in my diocese, I was unwilling to present a divided Christianity to heathen folk. I received a courteous letter from the secretary, in which he said, "I believe, for the interest of the Indians, that it is best to leave this field in your care, and we will withdraw our missionary." I consulted with Archdeacon Gilfillan as to a name for the new mission, and, remembering that the Book of Revelation speaks of "my servant Antipas where Satan dwelleth," we decided that it should be called St. Antipas. God has blessed us. Mahdwagononint became one of the noblest Christians I have known, and his village is the only village in Minnesota where all are Christians.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our deaconess, Miss Sybil Carter, who, with all the energy and devotion of her honored great-grandfather, Samuel Adams of Revolutionary fame, has made a grand success of the six lace schools which she has established among the Indians, four of which are in Minnesota. This lace compares favorably with the best imported laces, and received high commendation at the World's Fair in Chicago. There have been many instances where the Indians would have suffered from hunger, by the loss of their crops, had it not been for this industry. The lace-making has a refining influence upon these people. An Indian woman said to me, "Me wash hands to keep thread clean; me wash apron to keep lace clean; clean dress to keep apron clean; clean floor to keep dress clean; lace make everything clean, me like it."

The story of our labors for the Indians would not be complete if I did not speak of the conflicts which I have had, to secure justice for them, and to reform our Indian system. At the time when General Sibley appointed Christian Indians as his scouts, I asked him what he would do with their wives and children. Tears came into his eyes as he said, "I shall have to send them with the others, to the Missouri." I said 137 that I should take them to Faribault, which I did. Alexander Faribault, with his usual generosity, allowed them to camp on his land, and I was enabled, by the gifts of friends, to aid in their support At that time

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there was a sea captain living at Faribault. He one day overheard a party of bordermen say with an oath, "Bishop Whipple has taken a lot of those savages down to Faribault Let's go down and clean him out." "Do you know Bishop Whipple?" said the captain. "I do, and I will tell you what will happen if you try to clean him out. He will come out and talk to you for five minutes, and you will wonder how you ever made such cussed fools of yourselves." The leading papers of the State, however much they differed from me, always published my appeals for the Indians; but there were papers that denounced me as the patron and friend of savages, and in one I saw an article, headed in large type, "Awful Sacrilege! Holiest Rites of the Church administered to red-handed Murderers!" I am glad to say that the author became one of my firm friends, after he had received his sight.

In 1864, the legislature of Minnesota demanded that the Ojibways should be removed from their reservations. The Department selected a tract of land north of Leech lake, and sent out a special commissioner to make the treaty. He came to see me, and asked for my help in making the treaty. I told him that the Indians were not fools, and that, as the country which had been selected was the poorest in Minnesota, only valuable for its pine land, I knew that not an Indian would sign the treaty. He answered, "If you will not help me, I will show that I can make it without help." He called the Indians together, and said, "My friends, your Great Father has heard how you have been wronged. He looked in the North, the East, and the West, to find an honest man; and when he saw me, he said, 'Here is an honest man; I will send him to my red children.' Now, my friends, look at me. The winds of fifty-five winters have blown over my head, and have silvered it over with gray, and in all that time I have done no wrong to a single person. As your friend, I advise you to sign this treaty at once." Old Shabaskong, a Mille Lacs chief, sprang to his feet, and, with a wave of the hand, said: "Look at me. The winds of fifty-five winters have blown over 138 my head and have silvered it over with gray, but—they have not blown my brains away! I have done." That council was ended.

In those dark days, I visited Washington three or four In those dark days, I visited Washington four times each year, to plead for these Indians. There were times when

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they were in danger of starvation. At one time I received a message that there were not provisions enough at one of the reservations to last three weeks. I borrowed five hundred dollars from J. E. Thompson, and purchased flour for them. Mr. Thompson often loaned me money for my Indian missions, for in those days their support rested upon myself. He always refused to take interest, saying, "I do not think, Bishop, that our Heavenly Father ought to pay interest for money used in His work."

The first light that I had was when General Grant was elected President. He loved the Indians, and political pressure never made him turn from what he believed to be for their interest. Officers of the United States Army have always been my friends. General Sherman once said, "The Indian problem can be solved by one sentence of an old book, 'Do unto others as your would have them do unto you.'"

One of the most exciting conflicts that I had with the Indians was at Leech lake. I was on a visitation in the southern part of the State, when I received a telegram from George Bonga, "The Indians at Leech lake have killed the Government cattle and taken the Government goods, and I fear an outbreak." I repeated the telegram to General Grant, adding that Bonga was reliable. The answer came, "Go into the Indian country and settle this and we will ratify your act." It was a terrible journey, with the thermometer below zero, and the roads blocked by snowdrifts. Captain McCaskey, a noble soldier, accompanied me. When we reached Leech lake, the Indians met me in council. Flat Mouth arose and said: "I suppose you came to ask who killed the Government cattle, and who took the Government goods. My young men did it by my authority. Do you want to know why? Our pine land has been sold without our consent. We have been robbed. We shall suffer no more. Our shadows rest on our graves." He spoke for a half hour, with bitter sarcasm and denunciation of the United States government. I knew my only hope of controlling the Indians lay in silencing Flat Mouth. As he sat down, I arose and said quietly, "Flat Mouth, how long have you known me?" "Twelve years?" was the answer. "Have I ever told you a lie?" "No," came the reply, "you have not a forked tongue." "I shall not lie to you today," I continued. "I am not a servant of the Great Father; I am a servant of the Great

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Spirit. I cannot tell you what the Great Father will do; but if he does what he ought to do, if it takes ten thousand men he will arrest every Indian who has committed crime." As I expected, he was very angry, and sprang to his feet with flashing eyes and bitter words. When he stopped to take breath, for I had folded my arms and sat down, I asked quietly, "Flat Mouth, are you talking or am I talking? If you are talking, I will wait till you finish. If I am talking, I prefer you to wait." All the Indians shouted, "Ho! ho! ho!" Flat Mouth, by interrupting me, had broken their most sacred law of politeness, and the chief sat down overwhelmed with confusion, and I was left master of the situation. I told them that when I heard of the sale of the land, I informed the purchaser, who was my friend, that I should break up the sale. I wrote the Secretary of the Interior that I would carry it through all the courts if necessary. I consulted the Chief Justice of the United States. "But," I said, "when I ask good men to help me, and they ask if the Indians for whom I plead are the ones who stole the Government goods, killed the Government cattle, and threatened to murder white men, what shall I say? You are not fools. You know that you have gagged my tongue and fettered my hands. Talk this over among yourselves, and when you have made up your minds what to do send for me." I left the council, and the next morning Flat Mouth and his fellow chiefs came to me, and said, "We have been foolish. Tell us what to do, and we will follow your advice."

I will here mention that the responsibility for this sale did not belong either to the agent, the Rev. Mr. Smith, or to the purchaser. I know better, perhaps, than any of my fellow citizens, the history of that unfortunate transaction, and I know that these men were innocent. It would weary you to tell, ever so briefly, of those fierce conflicts. I should have failed if God had not given me strength beyond my own weak will.

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The history of our dealings with the Indians is a sad one. We may begin far back to where our Pilgrim fathers marched around a church, with file head of King Philip on a pole, to the music of a fife and drum, and then in solemn conclave decided that it was the will of God

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that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children, and therefore sold Philip's son as a slave to Bermuda.

Follow on to file time when Worcester, that noble Presbyterian missionary to the Cherokees, was tried, and sentenced to prison, for teaching the Cherokees to read. The case was carried to the Supreme Court of the United States, by Mr. Evarts, the father of William M. Evarts. Chief Justice Marshall decided that the law was unconstitutional. But the Supreme Court has no power to execute its mandates, and Worcester remained in prison. Little did the people of Georgia think that the day would come when a host of men, under the flag of that outraged Constitution, would descend from the top of Missionary Ridge, the home of that martyred servant of God, and lay waste all of that land which had been taken from the Cherokees.

You may still follow on to where a Moravian church was burned on the Lord's day, and the men, women, and children of a Christian Indian village were put to death. And so on to that fearful Cheyenne massacre, under Colonel Chivington, of which a commission (General Sherman was the president, and our honored fellow citizen, General Sanborn, was a member) said that the scenes which took place would have disgraced the most savage tribe of the interior of Africa.

We have spent more money in Indian wars than all the Christian churches of America have expended for missions; and in these wars (of which officers of the army, such as Sherman, Grant, Miles, and Crooks, have told me that they never knew an instance where the Indians were the first to violate a treaty), ten white men have been killed to one Indian.

Much of the wrong heaped upon the Indians was the direct fruit of a bad system. The men entrusted with the elevation of a heathen race were appointed agents as a reward for political service. The hands of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs were tied by Congress. The Secretary of the Interior had the care of eight bureaus, and the government felt that it had fulfilled its duty to its Indian wards when it established 141 almshouses to graduate

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savage paupers. The deadly fire-water, and the evil example of bad white men, completed the work of degradation.

Many of our presidents, whom I have known personally, have felt keenly the wrongs of the Indians. At my first visit to President Lincoln, after the Sioux massacre, there were tears in his eyes as I told him of our desolated border, and he said with impassioned voice, "When this civil war is over, if I live, this Indian system of iniquity shall be reformed." Secretary Stanton said to a friend of mine: "What does Bishop Whipple want? If he came to tell us of the iniquity of our Indian system, tell him we know it. But this government never reforms an evil until the people demand it. When the Bishop has reached the hearts of the people of the United States, the Indians will be saved." Presidents Arthur and Hayes gave me their entire sympathy.

In the first administration of President Cleveland, I called upon my friend, Chief Justice Waite, and said, "Will you tell me what you think of President Cleveland?" He answered, "I believe that he wants to know the truth; and when he knows it, no one can swerve him from his course." He took me to the President and introduced me. I told him that the Government had built dams on our Indian reservation, which had overflowed ninety-one thousand acres of pine land, destroyed their rice fields, and injured their fisheries; and that they had plead in vain for redress. Mr. Cleveland responded, "It is a great wrong. I will send for the Secretary of the Interior." He said to him, "I have asked Bishop Whipple to address you a letter giving the facts concerning these dams. When Congress meets send the letter promptly to me." He sent a special message to Congress with my letter, and the appropriation was made.

In correspondence with President McKinley, before his inauguration, I was deeply impressed by his Christian character. Secretary Bliss feels keenly the government's responsibility for its Indian wards. There is much yet to be done, but the difference at the end of thirty-eight years is as between darkness and daylight.

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The following facts speak volumes. Of the two hundred and fifty thousand Indians in the United States, besides those 142 in Alaska, eighty-eight thousand wear the civilized dress; twenty-five thousand live in houses; twenty-five thousand are communicants of Christian churches; twenty-two thousand are pupils in schools; thirty-eight thousand can read. The past year there were one hundred and seventy more births than deaths among the Ojibways in Minnesota. The records of the Interior Department show that in the past year fourteen Indians were killed by other Indians, and forty-four Indians were killed by whites. The Indians last year sold to the United States government, and to others, more than a million bushels of wheat and corn.

Yes, thank God, the atmosphere is clearing. The sentiment of justice is beginning to vibrate in the hearts of men everywhere. I owe a debt of gratitude to the Christian people of America and of Great Britain for their sympathy and help. The quakers of Philadelphia sent me two thousand dollars, with which the first cattle for the White Earth reservation were purchased. My friend, the Duke of Argyll, in writing me some years ago concerning our Indian wars, said, "That the government has treated the poor Indians with great injustice I have little doubt, for it is the habit of the white man so to treat all his half-civilized brethren all over the world." But the time has come when the cry that "there is no good Indian save a dead Indian" rings hollow, and he who utters it is no longer on the popular side. It may not be out of place in this jubilee year of that gracious Queen whom all Christian nations revere and honor for her noble Christian reign, to say that in that heart I have found a sympathy for my work for my brown children that could not be exceeded by the loving loyalty of my own countrymen.

For myself I have received an hundredfold for all my labors; and when I have finished my work, I would rather have one of these men, of the trembling eye and wandering foot, drop a tear over my grave and say, "He helped us when he could," than to have the finest monument.